

Statement for
General Michael E. Ryan
Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force
Before the
Senate Armed Services Committee
September 27, 2000

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear to discuss the readiness of the United States Air Force on behalf of our great team of mission-focused men and women. Our airmen offer their time, their talents, and their very lives to preserve the freedom and interests of our great nation. They are appreciative of the support of the Administration, the Congress and the American people.

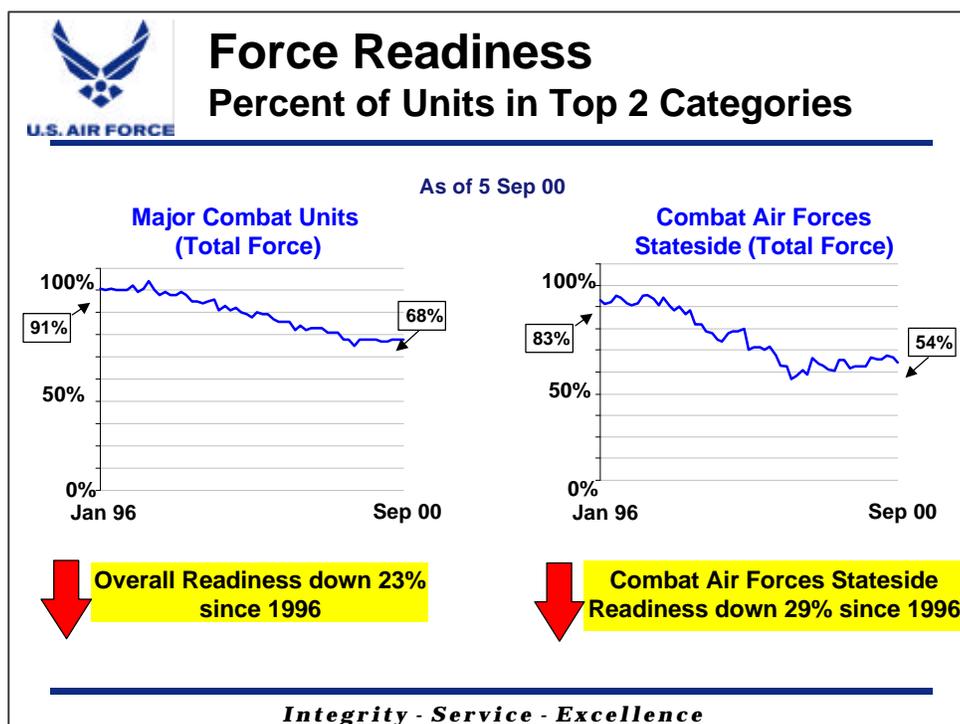
AEROSPACE POWER

The past decade has been one of full spectrum activity by the Air Force. Desert Storm to disaster response have proven the need for robust ready forces. The Air Force capabilities represented by our core competencies—aerospace superiority, information superiority, global attack, precision engagement, rapid global mobility and agile combat support—are critical to theater commanders who must respond quickly and decisively. That is why Air Force units are the early responders in major theater war scenarios and in day-to-day operations throughout the globe. In this last year following the victory in Kosovo we maintained our involvement in the full spectrum of

operations: keeping the peace in the Balkans, enforcing UN sanctions in Southwest Asia, responding to humanitarian crises, promoting worldwide mil-to-mil contacts, and engaging in counternarcotics support operations. To meet this kind of optempo we implemented our AEF scheduling one year ago. I believe it has been very successful in providing the CINCs trained-to-task forces while putting stability and predictability into the lives of our people.

We also appreciate the increased funding levels we received from both the administration and Congress. Pay raises, improvements in housing allowances and health care, plus retirement reform have been much appreciated as they address the needs of the force and have a positive impact on retention and recruitment issues. Added funding for people, spares and training have been very useful in addressing our critical readiness needs.

Having acknowledged all these efforts I must tell you that Air Force readiness has not turned around—at best these efforts have leveled off the decline.



The overall combat readiness of our combat units is down 23% since 1996. Because we must assure the readiness of our engaged forces overseas, we have done it at the expense of our stateside units. The reasons for these readiness declines have their basis in operations tempo, past underfunding of spares, dealing with older and aging systems, and a workforce that is less experienced because of retention declines.

OPS TEMPO

Our operations tempo remains high. Our people are still deploying over 3 times more often with a force 60% its former size. A brief overview outlines the kind of constant activity in which Air Force people are engaged. America's airmen are supporting Balkan air operations as part of the peacekeeping team providing stability there. In the past two years we've flown over 31,000 sorties, providing the top cover for NATO, in peace efforts in this fragile region of the world. In Southwest Asia, on almost a daily basis, our aircrews are fired upon and respond with force to police the no fly zones in northern and southern Iraq. Many are back in the desert for their fourth or fifth rotation, often in austere conditions. When floodwaters devastated the people of Mozambique and South Africa, Air Force people were there to respond. In that international effort, Airmen and aircraft provided relief distribution, aerial assessment of damage and water levels, and critical search and rescue. We also responded to humanitarian needs following floods in Venezuela and Vietnam, and a volcanic eruption in the Philippines.

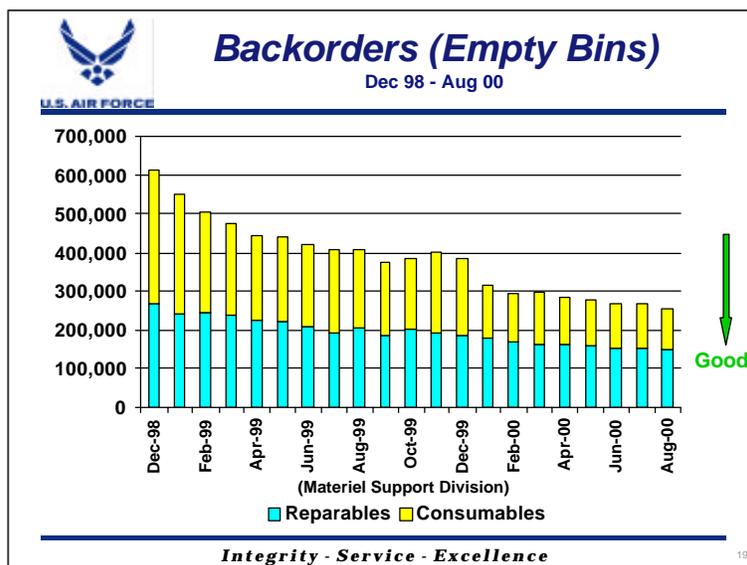
Here at home, this year marked the 5,000th launch from our Eastern and Western

ranges in support of space and missile operations. We've continued to train air force and military personnel from around the world, to build international bonds and interoperability. And in the west, active, Reserve and Air National Guard aircraft, including specialized C-130s, have contributed to fighting the devastating forest fires. They have dispensed nearly 2 million gallons of fire retardant in treacherous terrain and flight conditions.

For the past year, indeed the past ten years, we've supported counter-narcotics efforts in SOUTHCOM with Air Force aircraft, airfield experts, air traffic controllers, and search and rescue personnel. And in the Pacific, our forces sit on constant alert—vigilant and prepared to respond to threats to our alliances.

SPARES FUNDING

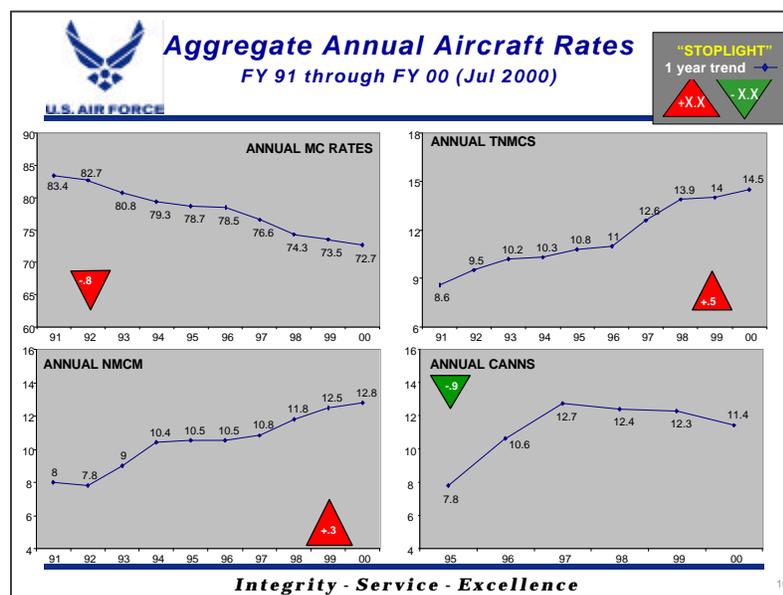
The level of peacetime spares is key to Air Force support of the ongoing day-to-day demands and surges in crisis and conflict. Additional funding we've received from the Administration and Congress in the past two years has been very helpful in putting parts on the shelves.



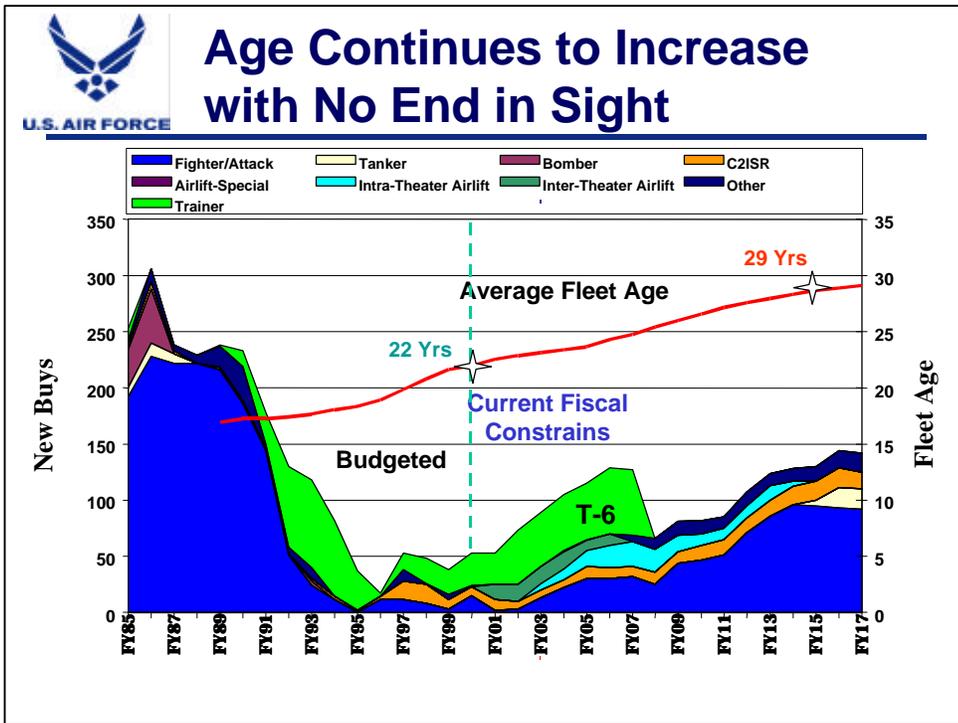
Using these increases, we've been able to reduce backorders (the empty bins) in our supply system by half.

MISSION CAPABLE RATES AND AGING AIRCRAFT

The additional spares on the shelves help significantly. There is much left to do. A lack of parts permeates several aspects of readiness: mission capable rates, cannibalization rates, and added work-hours for our people who try to meet mission demands without the equipment that they need.



The Mission Capable (MC) rates of our aircraft have continued to decline by over 10% since 1991. Mission Capable rates are directly proportional to how much time an aircraft is not available because of not having parts in supply (TNMCS) or because maintenance work needs to be done on the aircraft to make it ready (NMCM).



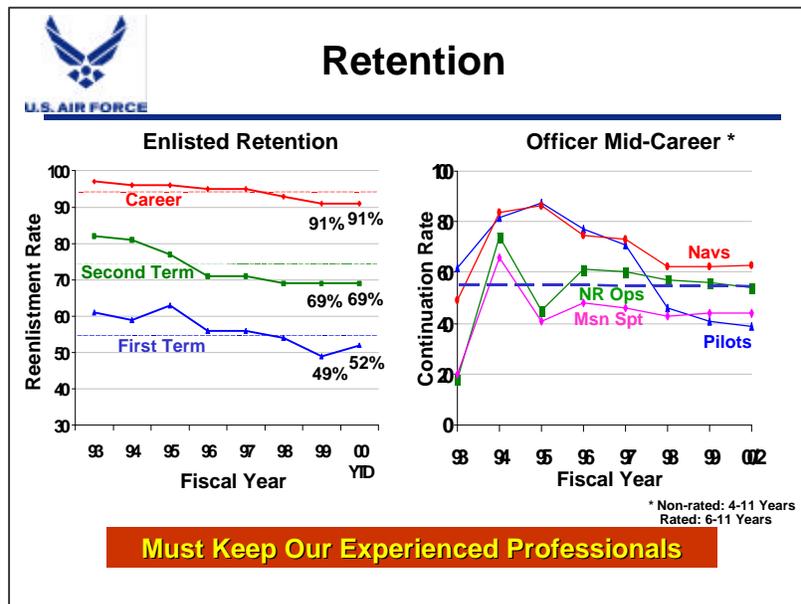
Both of these components have contributed to our current concern and one of the primary reasons is the average age of our current aircraft fleet. It is now almost 22 years old. The older the aircraft the more difficult and expensive it is to maintain. And even if we execute what is in our current fiscally constrained programs the aircraft age of a USAF aircraft will reach almost 30 years old in the next 15 years. That is why it is so important to continue the force modernization with needed capabilities such as airlift and trainers and revolutionary combat capability such as the F-22.

PEOPLE

People continue to be our most vital resource—they are the most critical component of readiness. The intense demands we place on our warriors as they perform Air Force missions around the world require highly motivated, highly skilled,

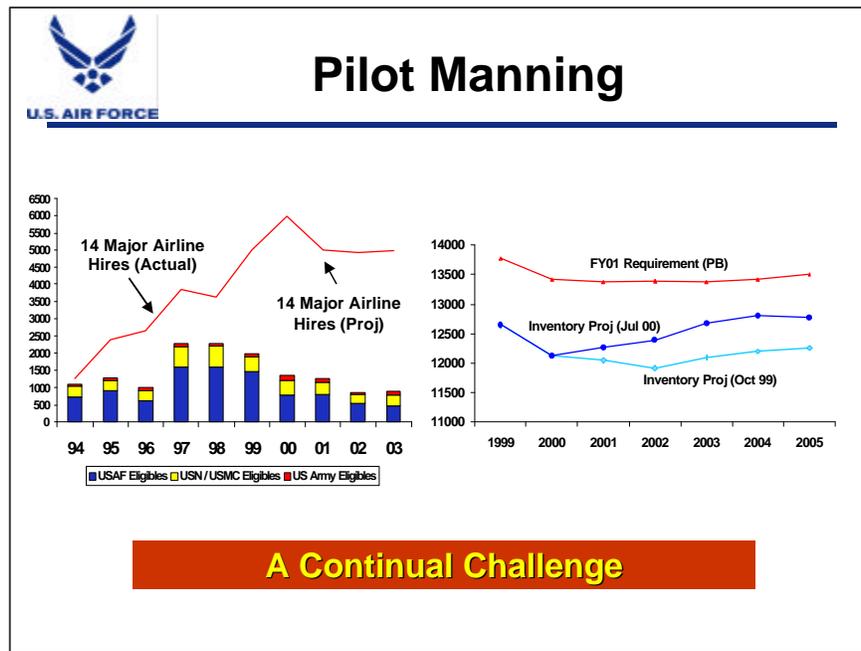
professional airmen. However, today we are performing more missions with fewer people. Indeed, today's active duty force is smaller than at any other time in Air Force history—yet, we are busier than ever. We're grateful for the commitment and visible action from the Administration and Congress to take care of our people

Recruiting and retention of our enlisted force are key factors in the readiness equation. Although we recruited more airmen in 1999 than 1998, 1999 was the first year that we did not meet our recruiting goal—a goal which we had raised in



order to make up for our losses. I'm happy to report that, due to focused efforts on recruiting, we've met our active duty recruiting goal for FY 2000. Successful initiatives have included a recruiter plus-up, enlistment bonus enhancements, a new college loan repayment program, and a more robust program bringing prior service personnel back to active duty.

During the last several years, the overall retention rate remains a serious concern. We fell below our end strength authorization of 361,000 active duty members by 5,300 people. Enlisted retention levels are below goal for our first term, second term, and career airmen, and are the principal contributors to this shortfall. There are indications that the retention declines are leveling off but we are still below our retention goals. Officer retention is below our desired levels in both pilots and mission support. The negative retention trend exacerbates the high operations tempo problem because it places a greater burden on those who continue to serve.



For example, while there is still a huge demand for our pilots and a shortage of 1200 pilots exists today, the additional bonuses have made an impact. Our projections show that we should be able to cut our pilot shortfall almost in half over the next five years through increased retention and production. The highly technical nature of our aerospace force today and in the 21st century requires us to retain highly skilled individuals, especially our mid-level NCOs and officers, to ensure we can execute our

missions.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Because quality people are so important to readiness, we must also ensure they have a quality working and living environment. In September of 1998 I stated the following: “Because of funding shortfalls, we have significantly under-invested in our base operating support, real property maintenance, family housing, and military construction. We cannot continue to mortgage this area of our force readiness without significant long-term effects.” That has not changed and remains true today. We are mortgaging the infrastructure aspect of our force readiness to stem the decline in operational readiness. Over the past six years we have averaged an investment in infrastructure at a 250-year replacement rate. Industry standard is 50 years. We have a \$4.3 billion real property maintenance backlog. Our houses average 36 years of age. We can only afford to renovate a small percentage of these houses each year out of the almost 110,000 houses we maintain. While there is a need for another round of BRAC, we cannot continue this under-investment or it will have a compounding effect on our near term and long term readiness.

SUMMARY

Is the Air Force capable of fighting and winning today...absolutely! It was demonstrated again last year with the victory in the Air War over Serbia. The men and women of your Air Force are dedicated and selfless professionals. Their skills are the envy of the militaries of the world and the private sector. Approximately 90,000 of them are forward stationed and deployed throughout the world today—all of them eager for

the adventure; many of them enduring another long separation from home without complaint. They're working long hours to accomplish the mission and stretch the equipment and supplies to meet the demand. In return, they deserve the best equipment and training, quality medical care, adequate housing, sensible pay, and reasonable retirement benefits for their service.

We remain concerned about the continued downturn in near term readiness outlined in this and previous statements. Readiness remains a struggle we must win. But of equal concern is our long-term readiness. That will in large measure be driven by our ability to recapitalize our aging force structure. As we enter this next millenium, prudence dictates that we fund the recapitalization of the force structure for the tasks the Air Force is being asked to perform in the 21st century. As I said in 1998 testimony, "We need substantial and sustained funding" to continue to provide the full spectrum aerospace power our nation expects." That has not changed.

We appreciate all this committee has done in helping to address these critical readiness issues and look forward to working with you in the future.